

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 9733

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINT, PGOV, CI

SUBJECT: CHURCH REPLIES TO PINOCHET'S CHALLENGE

REF: SANTIAGO 9646

1. SUMMARY: AFTER SOME HESITANCY AND BUFFETED BY CONFLICTING PRESSURES, THE CHILEAN CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS DENIED STRONGLY PRESIDENT PINOCHET'S ASSERTIONS THAT THE RECENT MEETING BETWEEN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC (PDC) POLITICIANS AND LABOR LEADERS ON CHURCH PROPERTY WAS IN ANY WAY ILLEGAL, AND HIS SUGGESTIONS THAT THE VICARIATE OF SOLIDARITY IS A PAWN IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY. THE GOC HAS THE NEXT MOVE, BUT IS LIKELY TO KEEP ITS REACTION MUTED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE THREE PDC POLITICIANS PARTICIPATING IN THE NOVEMBER 16 MEETING AT A CHURCH RETREAT WROTE CARDINAL SILVA A LETTER, MADE PUBLIC NOVEMBER 30. THE LETTER (WHICH WAS CLEARED IN DRAFT BY THE CARDINAL) STATES THAT THE TRIO MET WITH THE LABOR LEADERS TO FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES WITH THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL LABOR SITUATION AND NOT TO DISCUSS POLITICAL ISSUES AS THE GOC CHARGED. IT DENIES CATEGORICALLY THAT THE MEETING WAS SECRET, AND ADDS, IF THE GOC THINKS THAT MEETING ON CHURCH PROPERTY IS "FOREIGN TO CHILEAN TRADITIONS" AS PINOCHET SAID, IT SHOULD RECALL THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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NEVER IN CHILE'S LONG HISTORY HAS SUCH A CLIMATE OF FEAR AND SUSPICION EXISTED. THE LETTER CONCLUDES WITH AN APOLOGY TO THE CARDINAL FOR ANY EMBARRASSMENT CAUSED THE CHURCH BY THE GOC'S HANDLING OF THE INCIDENT.

3. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE ARCHBISHOPRIC OF SANTIAGO PUT OUT A TOUGH COMMUNIQUE. IT CONTRASTED PINOCHET'S ASSERTION THAT SECURITY FORCES

HAD HAD THE COOPERATION OF CONVENT AUTHORITIES TO CONDUCT THE "BOMB SEARCH" WITH THE FACT THAT TWENTY ARMED POLICE HAD ABRUPTLY DEMANDED ACCESS TO THE BUILDING. IT NOTED THAT THE GOC KNEW THE BUILDING WAS USED FOR PRIVATE MEETINGS SINCE PROMINENT GOC FIGURES HAD MET THERE IN THE PAST. THE DECLARATION STRESSED THE CHURCH'S SUPPORT FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS TO EXPRESS CONCERNS PUBLICLY AND TO AUTHORITIES, OBSERVING THAT CURTAILMENT OF THIS RIGHT CREATES UNREST AND INSECURITY. "THE CHURCH LAMENTS THE PROLONGED AND EVEN INTENSIFYING RESTRICTIONS ON LABOR ACTIVITY WHILE GROUPS WITH MONEY AND POWER FIND IT EASY TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND EXPRESS CRITICISM OF POLICIES ADVERSELY AFFECTING THEM."

4. THE COMMUNIQUE SAID THAT "COMMENTS MADE TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE VICARIATE UNJUSTLY INJURE THOSE WORKING IN THESE ORGANIZATIONS AND THE MANY OTHERS WHO SUPPORT THEIR SELFLESS LABOR. THE SANTIAGO CHURCH DISAGREES WITH SUCH COMMENTS AND REITERATES ITS THANKS AND SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO WORK SO GENEROUSLY FOR THE GOOD OF CHILE." IT CONCLUDES WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT "THE VARIOUS INCIDENTS ADDRESSED IN THIS DECLARATION HAVE ALREADY PROVOKED AN INTERNATIONAL REACTION UNFAVORABLE TO CHILE'S IMAGE." AND IT REPEATS THE CALL MADE BY THE BISHOPS EARLIER IN THE YEAR FOR AN END TO RULE UNDER EMERGENCY POWERS.

5. THE FULL TEXTS OF COMMUNIQUE AND LETTER APPEARED IN ALL THE NOVEMBER 30 PRESS EXCEPT GOC-OWNED "EL CRONISTA" WHICH PRINTED EXCERPTS. "EL MERCURIO" ALSO PUBLISHED LETTERS FROM THE VICARIATE
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AND RADIO CHILENA OBJECTING TO ONE OF ARTURO FONTAINE'S WEEKLY EDITORIALS IN WHICH HE CLAIMED THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS WERE INVOLVED IN POLITICS.

6. COMMENT: PINOCHET'S LETTER AND HIS CALCULATED OUTBURST AGAINST THE VICARIATE NOVEMBER 23 WERE JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBURG OF EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE THE LINKS AMONG POLITICAL, LABOR AND CHURCH OPPONENTS. THE GOC'S CHURCH LIAISON TEAM LED BY RETIRED GENERAL COURTS HAS BEEN WORKING ASSIDUOUSLY WITH KEY CHURCH FIGURES SUCH AS BISHOPS VALECH AND VALENZUELA TO CONVINCE THEM THAT THE VICARIATE IS PENETRATED BY LEFTISTS AND IS EXCEEDING REASONABLE HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL MANDATES. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE CUMULATIVE WEIGHT OF THESE REPRESENTATIONS WAS BEGINNING TO CAUSE THE CARDINAL TO VACILLATE IN HIS SUPPORT FOR THE VICARIATE AND ITS DIFFUSE OPERATIONS.

7. THE COMMUNIQUE SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT THOSE WITHIN THE CHURCH DETERMINED TO RESIST GOC PRESSURE HAVE EMERGED ON TOP. IT IS A VICTORY FOR THE ACTIVISTS IN GENERAL AND FOR THE VICARIATE IN PARTICULAR. THE EXPLICIT BACKING FOR THE VICARIATE STAFF IS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT, GIVEN THE GOC CLAIMS THAT THE STAFF HAS BEEN PENETRATED BY THE RADICAL LEFT.

8. THE NEXT MOVE IS UP TO THE GOC, BUT WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT NEITHER THE CHURCH NOR THE STATE WANT TO PUS THIS CONFRONTATION TO THE BREAKING POINT. TWO GOVERNMENT ACTIONS REINFORCE THIS BELIEF: A) DECEMBER 1 THE GOC ANNOUNCED IT WOULD MAKE NO FORMAL REPLY TO THE PDC AND CHURCH DOCUMENTS, LETTING THE PEOPLE DECIDE WHICH VERSION OF THE CONVENT MEETING TO BELIEVE; AND, B) THE SANTIAGO EMERGENCY ZONE CALLED ATTENTION TO EXISTING REQUIREMENTS THAT ALL MEETINGS MUST HAVE PRIOR APPROVAL.
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